(b) if so, the list of importers of chemical wastes registered with the Ministry; and

(c) number of complaints received against such erring importers and action taken during the last three years?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) The import of hazardous wastes is strictly regulated by Government through the Hazardous Wastes (Management and Handling) Rules(HW Rules) notified in 1989 as amended in 2000 and 2003 and through the EXIM Policy of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT). Under the provisions of the HW Rules and the EXIM Policy, no hazardous wastes can be imported into the country without valid permission from Government.

(b) Used oil and twenty-two identified non-ferrous metal wastes specified under Schedule 4 of the HW Rules, can be imported by actual users having environmentally sound management facilities for reprocessing such wastes and registered with the Ministry of Environment and Forests/Central Pollution Control Board under the Registration Scheme. A total of 277 units have been granted registration till date.

(c) All the State Pollution Control Boards/Pollution Control Committees have been advised to initiate action against units involved in illegal imports of hazardous wastes in violation of laid down procedures, as prescribed under the HW Rules.

Sand mining on the river beds

1909. SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that sand mining on the river beds is rampant in the country, particularly in Kerala;

(b) if so, whether such activities causes the depletion of the water levels of these rivers;

(c) whether such depletion in the water levels cause the saline ocean water entering to the fresh water rivers;

(d) if so, details thereon along with the rivers, so far, identified particularly in Kerala affected with this problem.

(e) the details of the ecological and environmental problems caused by the phenomenon; and

(f) the details of steps taken by Government to prevent further damages?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) to (c) Yes, Sir.

(d) and (e) Studies carried out by Centre for Earth Science Studies, Thiruvananthapuram on Periyar and Bharatapuzha rivers in Kerala have indicated that due to excessive sand mining there is an imbalance in the natural environmental setting of river-eco-systems, depletion of sediment supply, lowering of elevation of stream flow affecting the water table of the floodplain, stress on biological community and damage to engineering structures like bridges, bank protection etc.

(f) As per the provisions of the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 1991, mining of sand in Coastal Regulation Zone areas is a prohibited activity.

Conservation and purification of rivers

1910. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have started a scheme of conserving and purifying major rivers in the country;

(b) if so, how many rivers have been taken up under the scheme; and

(c) what is the present status of the implementation of the scheme?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. A Centrally Sponsored Scheme of National River Conservation Plan (NRCP) is under implementation to cover pollution abatement works in 157 towns along polluted stretches of 31 rivers spread over 18 States.